

Launch of the Inkomati Catchment Management Agency
Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
2 November 2006

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; it is both a pleasure and a privilege to join you today at this very important occasion.

Today South Africa is joining other countries of the World in implementing one of the resolutions agreed to at the RIO World Summit in 1992. This resolution was further re-enforced at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The resolution is a simple one, but a profound one. It is a resolution that decision-making regarding natural resources be done at the lowest appropriate level; a resolution that people should be involved in natural resource management decisions that affect their lives.

The White Paper on a National Water Policy for South Africa gives effect to this approach, allowing for the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies, which “will be developmental in nature, and serve the interests of equity, corrective action and optimum use of water. The governance structure of Catchment Management Agencies will balance the requirement to reflect the interests of various stakeholders with the need to ensure the effective management of the catchment area.”

So, we are here today to witness the birth of the first of 19 Catchment Management Agencies. It has been a long gestation period, but I am sure that this baby will grow into a healthy and wise adult in time.

President Mbeki, in his State of the Nation Address, pointed out that this year sees both the 15th Anniversary of the first meeting of CODESA, and the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of our Constitution. Both these events were seminal in that they shaped the road ahead for our country, a road towards peace and prosperity. In these years we have travelled well down this road and have indeed made much progress. However, there are still many challenges ahead, and these challenges we must face head-on if we are to achieve our dream of a truly peaceful and prosperous nation.

National Government has not been scared to face the many challenges of redressing the inequities that have scarred our history. But re-building a nation is not for the faint hearted. It was in the early 1860's that Abraham Lincoln, the US President who was responsible for the dismantling of slavery in that country, noted that “a house divided against itself cannot stand”. After almost five years of civil war President Lincoln pointed out that the hardest part of the war was to be able to accept each other in brotherhood and sisterhood, and to work together to re-build the nation.

Some 140 years later we as a nation find ourselves in a similar position. The house could not stand and it is now up to us, together, to re-build our nation for the benefit of all its citizens. To quote President Mbeki: “Periods of a decade and decade-and-a-half are but fleeting moments in the life of any nation”. In our case we have lived through these years conscious of the enormous effort it would require of all of us to unshackle our country from the heavy chains that tie us to its past. We have known that it would take considerable time before we could say we have eradicated the legacy of the past. We have expected that the circumstances handed down to us by our history would indeed condemn us to a ‘petty pace’ of progress towards the achievement of the goal of “a better life for all”.

While we have done well over the past 12 years, we still have much to do and achieve. We are a water scarce country. We are also a country with very high levels of poverty, particularly in our rural areas. Because of *apartheid*, the vast majority of poor people in this country are black. Poverty wears the mask of an African woman. It is our job to change that. It is the job of the Inkomati Catchment Management Agency to change that. We must eradicate poverty so that all our people can live in dignity, so that all our children can reach their full potential, so that our nation can grow and prosper.

This means that we must find creative ways to ensure that water is available to black people in South Africa – not just water for drinking, food and washing, but water for productive purposes - water for irrigation, for businesses, for economic development. We must find creative ways to redistribute water and access to the benefits derived from water.

Compulsory licensing is one tool in our armament for redistribution of water. It is a tool that will, and must be applied in the Inkomati area very soon. This is an area of water stress – demand exceeds supply here. You know that, better than I. We cannot *make* more water. Therefore, in order to achieve equity, in order to give black people access to water for productive purposes, we will have to reduce the water use by the privileged white minority. The Catchment Management Agency will be a crucial part of this process. It is my sincere hope that through the representation of all stakeholders on the Catchment Management Agency Board, through wide spread consultation, the people of the Inkomati area will work together for a sustainable and equitable distribution of water.

Of course, this is also an area prone to droughts, and floods, like many other parts of South Africa. The Catchment Management Agency will have to plan for the future. It will have to plan, with the people of Inkomati, to ensure that there is sufficient water to get through the dry and the wet periods. It will have to plan what to do when there is not enough water. It will have to plan how to ensure sufficient water of an appropriate quality to foster economic growth and development in this area. In this planning it will have to work very closely with local, provincial and national government. This Catchment Management Agency will lead the way in ensuring that local governments' Integrated Development Plans, the provincial growth and development plans, the plans of national departments and the National Water Resources Strategy, are all reflected in and supported by the Inkomati Catchment Management Strategy.

Crucially, I also expect the Catchment Management Agency to forcefully drive a programme for water conservation and demand management in all sectors using water in this area. We know that there are high levels of water wastage in local authorities. We know that many farmers can improve their water use. We know that removing illegal plantations and invasive alien plants will make more water available for legitimate users and for redistribution to those who have no water.

And at the same time, while trying to squeeze out enough water to meet the needs of the people of Inkomati, the Catchment Management Agencies will have to ensure that they protect our rivers and wetlands. They must ensure that there is sufficient water to meet the reserve; water that is crucial to maintain the life and health of our rivers; water that will ensure that our children's children can still bask in the beauty of our rivers.

The Inkomati Catchment Management Agency faces another challenge, however - ensuring that we provide water to neighbouring states as agreed. The SADC region is one of the few areas in the world with a functioning protocol on managing shared river basins. Our water law is very progressive on this matter, recognizing the importance of ensuring water for downstream countries. We do this not just because it is the law and we are obliged to, but because we are committed to the development of the region, and we know how important water is for development, in South Africa, and in Mozambique, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and indeed, everywhere.

The presence today of the Ministers from Mozambique and Swaziland shows the importance of multilateral co-operation in the use and management of shared watercourses. South Africa has established a joint water commission with Mozambique and with Swaziland, as well as, all three countries forming the Tripartite Permanent Technical Committee. This committee will help to manage the water flow of the Inkomati River and Maputo River during times of drought and flood, and they will be looking at how to protect and develop these water resources.

I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate Mozambique on their willingness to host the Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM) Secretariat. This commission sees cooperation between South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe to improve general water resource management in the Limpopo Basin, as well as do water resource assessments and work with the United Nations Habitat on a project on land use planning, flood warning and flood mitigation.

The Inkomati Catchment Management Agency was the first to be established. Since then I have established another three, and I will establish a further four during the course of this year. We must recognize that it has been a slow process to reach this point, but things are now beginning to gather speed and momentum. It is my firm belief that the slower processes have allowed for better and deeper consultation as well as allowing the necessary time for less informed stakeholders to get on board. Ultimately, I believe that this approach is more credible and will provide for a more sustainable institution in the longer term.

It is extremely important that we bring all stakeholders on board, particularly the poor and the marginalized. The establishment of this Catchment Management Agency is a critical part of deepening democracy in this area. It is

important that we place our crosses on ballot sheets on election days. But this is not the “be-all and end-all” of democracy. The right to have your say about a variety of matters that impact upon your life is an important aspect of a democratic society. Catchment Management Agencies will foster more localized water resource management through participative structures and processes. Hence, with time and the development of institutional capacity Catchment Management Agencies will be delegated increasing functions and responsibilities. They will become, once operational, the voice and face of water resource management in this water management area. As such I expect them to communicate with stakeholders, to listen to stakeholders, and to ensure that stakeholders have the channels and mechanisms to communicate their needs and requirements to the Agency. In particular, I expect them to listen to the voices of the poor, the marginalized and the weak.

I expect this Agency to be developmental in nature, to champion the development and upliftment of poor, rural and marginalized communities. I expect them to help us to achieve the Government agenda.

The first Business Plan for the Inkomati Catchment Management Agency has been developed and approved by me. The Catchment Management Agency has appointed a Chief Executive Officer (Mr Sizile Ndlovu). Within the next few months they will make appointments of first line managers and will start making their presence felt within this water management area. My Department will provide technical, administrative and financial support throughout the institutional development period.

The family of Water Management Institutions represents a reservoir of technical and managerial skills that we must harness in the process of building the capacity of all institutions responsible for managing water and delivering services to our people. The Komati Basin Water Authority, (KOBWA), around the corner, is a case in point where you can foster good working relations and the sharing of expertise. We need to appreciate and strategize on how to efficiently use the skills and expertise of the people in the Water Sector that have been accumulated over time. We must also keep in mind that Government over the past number of years has heavily invested in these people. This is the investment that we need to utilize for equitable social and economic development.

I am aware that the Board of the Inkomati Catchment Management Agency has developed a plan to communicate their activities and new role they will be playing in the management of water within the entire Catchment and will soon be seen and heard by all our communities. I applaud and encourage these efforts.

I will ensure that the Board of Inkomati puts in place excellent corporate governance supported by good functional policies, systems, procedures and compliance requirements so that they are not found wanting by oversight bodies and do not let down the people of Nkomati through poor governance of the institution. Be assured of my Department’s full support in this matter.

Let me end by commending Board Members for taking an enormous responsibility of stewardship of the first water Catchment Management Agency of its kind in South Africa. Your task requires a high degree of integrity, commitment, and responsibility. I trust that you will exercise your role in this spirit, and in the interests of the people of South Africa, and in the aim of developing a better life for all.

I thank you.